

MAKING MASONRY EFFECTIVE

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ONE of the greatest tasks confronting the Craft today, if, indeed, it is not the very greatest the fraternity has ever had to face, is that of making Masonry itself effective in the life of the world. In order to avoid misunderstanding later on we must, of course, at the very beginning, come to an agreement of what we mean by "making Masonry effective." If we do not some of us are apt to be thinking of one thing and the rest of us about something entirely different, much to the confusion of us all. We need to understand, also, that a definition, to be really successful, must be simple enough to be intelligible to the ordinary person and, at the same time, it must avoid the mistake of a simple resort to synonymous terms, as sometimes happens.

In the fewest possible words, then, as well as in the simplest we can hope to command, " making Masonry effective " means putting Masonry, and all it stands for, to work in the affairs of men, more especially in the affairs of Craftsmen themselves. It may mean a great deal more, of course; but it most assuredly cannot mean less.

There may be a feeling of surprise on the part of some that any one should consider it necessary to have to say anything at all on the subject. This attitude, I think, is due to the supposition that because Masonry is old, and because lodges are found almost everywhere, it has, for that very reason, been as effectively at work in the world as we have a right to expect. But because a great deal has been laid and written on the general subject of Masonry (no other Fraternity in all history having produced such a body of literature) it does not follow, of necessity, that Masonry has been as effective as it might be or as it ought to be. On the contrary, if Masonry is to have any particular permanent value it must not be simply something to talk about; something to provide an interesting field for philosophical speculation; something, if you will, as so often happens in the case of religion, to believe; it must be instead a dynamic power working not alone for the benefit of the Craft, but for the uplift of humanity as well. This it might be, I am persuaded, with results so conspicuous as to be observable wherever Masonry is known.

Masonry may be, as I suppose we all believe, the best as well as the greatest fraternal organization in the world; but, unless its influence for good, its power for ever-increasing betterment in the life of the world, goes out in constantly widening circles - like those which go out from the point where a pebble is cast into the water - it might as well not exist at all as far as the welfare and the happiness of humanity as a whole is concerned.

Too long, much to the detriment of the world as well as to the Fraternity, many of our members have thought, and even taught, that Masonry was an organization to belong to, instead of something to be done; or, in other words, a kind of a life to be lived. It would seem, then, that before Masonry can be as effective in the world as it is capable of being, and as it ought to be, there will have to be, on the part of the Craft in general, an awakening to the realization that there is a vast difference between these two conceptions of Masonry; that, in point of fact, they have little or nothing in common.

If some one in your family, or in mine, were seriously ill and the physicians called in only offered philosophical dissertations upon the antiquity, or the beauty, or the symbolism of their system of treatment - and not only did nothing, but arrived at no decision as to what to do - until the patient died, would we not be justified in refusing to pay fees? Or even in bringing legal action for malpractice? Nay, more, would it not be our duty to do so that others might be protected ?

The question for us to face seriously is this: Has not something of this sort, on a scale I am afraid none of us fully appreciate, been going on for years in Masonry ? Are there not literally hundreds of thousands, if not millions, who still think that Masonry is simply a fraternal and social organization - something to belong to - something, perhaps, to talk about in eloquent and flowery language? How many think of it as something to be put to work effectively in the life of the world? Do we not, as Masons, need to come to grips with the truth that until all that Masonry is, and all that it stands for, is actually put to work in the world's life, we cannot expect, and have no right to expect, that the world of the future will be very different from that of the present?

Men, as Masons, differ widely as to their theories concerning Masonry, which, of course, is simply what they say and think about this great subject. But if, somehow, we can give the majority of the Craft, or at least those who will be the fraternal leaders of the future, a real understanding - or, better still, a vision - of the vital necessity for Masonic living, as opposed to the "lodge membership idea" that so often in these days passes for Masonry, then the Fraternity will be able to take that position and function for which it was designed by its founders.

Was not the Good Samaritan made the hero of one of the greatest of the parables because he was one who practiced actual brotherhood, instead of one who regarded it only as something to talk about ? And did not Jesus find it necessary to rebuke even some of those who hailed him most loudly as the long expected Messiah, though they unquestioningly accepted the whole body of his preaching, because they so signally failed to see any particular necessity for putting what they had accepted into practice? Evidently they believed Jesus was the one whose coming had been foretold; but, in actual living, they made too wide circles around that religion of brotherhood and of the Golden Rule which had been presented to them by the Master.

Would not most of us, certainly far too many of us, be likewise found wanting if we were to be weighed in the balance, Masonically, against these things ? Are we not too content with being in good standing, or doing well whatever share of the lodge work is committed to us? And are we not too little concerned with making Masonry, from the higher point of view, really effective ? Do we not all need to understand that Masonry has not been as effective in the life of the world as it should be, largely because we have accepted the erroneous idea that, being powerful and wealthy, it will for that reason prevail whether we do our share or not ? How can Masonry be really effective if we merely belong to lodges, attend the meetings with some degree of regularity, build beautiful temples, help keep the "degree mill" running smoothly, and read what we can of that abundance of magazines and books which is available, or now and again lift up our voices to sing the praise of speculative Masonry, while we ignore, or fail to see, that Masonry can prevail only to the extent that we put on the armor with which it equips us and go forth, both individually and collectively, to put its high teachings to work in everyday life ?

We ought to begin to see, it seems to me, that Masonry will be just as effective in the life of the world - and no more - as the extent to which the Masons of any time put forth efforts to make it effective. The truth of the fatherhood of God, the brotherhood of man, the supremacy of character, the immortality of the soul; these great fundamental truths upon which all else in Masonry, no less than in religion, depend; might, from the point of view of belief, be accepted by every Mason and yet the world be no better off; for, unless these sublime truths are lived, as the great and the good of the Fraternity have tried to live them, each in his own way, Masonry cannot possibly be said to be effective in any true sense.

I do not wish, in any way, to give the impression that Masonry has been wholly without its good effect. Far from it ! Masonry has done wonders ! It has been no less successful than religion in developing its "saints," so to speak. It has done a vast amount of benevolent and charitable work about which the world knows little. In this country at any rate it has been the mighty champion of that bulwark of the nation, the public school. And in other ways, too numerous to mention, it has ministered to the wants of a needy world. But in spite of all this only a fool, or one completely blind to the facts, could assert that Masonry has been as effective in the world as it ought to have been and as it has the power to be. That Masonry, through its long history, has, in many respects, had a truly remarkable effect upon the world, there can be but little doubt. But think how much more effective it might have been if only those who have had the honor of being made Masons had done their full share to make it so ! Could not the finger of such an organization write upon the walls of Time the sentence of doom for everything detrimental to the best interests of humanity? Would it not make the zeal and enthusiasm of the old crusaders appear, by comparison, as the pageantry of children at play in the streets ?

Masonry is another such giant of power with possibilities beyond the estimation of most of us. It is not as effective as it might be because we have not yet learned how to harness and use it excepting in almost primitive ways. We still labor under the misapprehension that the geographical spread and the numerical strength of Masonry, is all that is necessary to guarantee its complete success. We fail to see, many of us, that Masonry must be operative today, as well as tomorrow; and that if it isn't more and more put into practice now the chances are all against its being any more effective at any future period than it is at present.

The world, it may be without any great portion of it knowing the actual reason, has grown weary, so it would seem, of profession without performance. Masonry will not be excepted from the judgment, therefore we must set ourselves seriously to doing our part, that whatever of true Masonry we may have absorbed, may be put into action in our daily life.

Some of us are right and some of us are wrong in our theories of Masonry, but all of us are wrong as long as anything in or about organization is permitted to rank higher than Masonic living. Masonry cannot be as effective as it might be, and rightfully should be, as long as any considerable number of its members are actually persuaded that membership in a great fraternal order is all there is to Masonry.

A good attendance at the meetings, a well appointed and well kept lodge room, a splendid exemplification of the different degrees, fine fellowship, enjoyable "feeds"; these, and all else pertaining to Masonry, are but means to an end. And the end itself ? The great responsibility of seeing that true Masonry becomes a life in the individuals who have been privileged to pass the lodge portals !

There are many phrases of Masonry with which we may concern ourselves but let us not make the mistake of putting our emphasis upon secondary considerations to the neglect of the real purpose of Masonry, which is the gradual development of the character of every individual Mason. The way, as I see it, to come somewhere near making Masonry as effective in the life of the world, as, under ideal conditions, it could be, is for each Mason to do his very best to build out of his own growing life the growing temple of the living God.

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